The Brandywine Village - A Success Story
Redevelopment of an Abandoned Gas Station

Background

The Brandywine Village, in Wilmington, DE, is a historic neighborhood dating back to Colonial times. The neighborhood is mostly residential with one 2-3 block commercial district that consists of historic homes which have been converted into businesses. In the middle of this historic neighborhood, stood an eyesore for the community, an abandoned gas station called Hi-Tech. The site, abandoned since 1995, was located at a highly traveled gateway intersection across the street from colonial homes and a historic church.

The Challenge

The City of Wilmington, anxious to be rid of this eye-sore, went to work on researching the ownership of the Hi-Tech gas station in 2001. After a year of searching, the City determined that ths site had several owners hiding behind a company called Punjab, Inc.

While the ownership research was underway, the City was also looking into evidence of petroleum leaks which occurred in 1993 and 1997.

The tanks on the premises had been emptied but were still in the ground and the City expected to find contamination when excavation began.

Because of the many violations on the property and in the site's history, both the Delaware Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control (DNREC) and the City's Revenue Enforcement office began enforcement proceedings as a way to motivate the owner to sell at lower than market value.

The Solution

As the owner of the property moved closer to consider selling at a price the City could afford, the Office of Economic Development (OED) began to work on building a case for the City to purchase the property. At this juncture, partnerships with local community groups became critical.

The OED realized that in order to convince Wilmington's City Council to buy the property, they would need to present them with a re-use plan. To develop this plan, the city turned to the Greater Brandywine Village Revitalization Group, which had a reuse plan for the Brandywine Village District that included the Hi-Tech site, and other communitiy organizations.

This plan envisioned this site as combined with neighboring sites to become a mixed-use retail office and village green. Because there was no immediate interest from developers in the beginning of this larger project, the City and its community partners decided that either a park or a parking lot would fulfill their three immediate goals: meeting the needs of Brandywine Village; cleaning up the site; and keeping redevelopment costs low.

The Benefit

Today, the Hi-Tech gas station site has been converted into the Brandywine Village Green.

The site combines aesthetically pleasing greenspace with a useful pavement parking lot and a public demonstration of creative ways to reduce stormwater runoff.